

Council 4 AFSCME Testimony for HB 5339, AA Imposing a Mandatory Minimum Sentence for Assault of Public Safety, Emergency Medical or Public Transit Personnel

Public Safety Committee – March 2, 2010

Good afternoon, Chairman Stillman and Chairman Dargan. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative representative for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 public and private employees, including 5,000 Department of Correction employees.

Council 4 supports HB 5339, AA Imposing a Mandatory Minimum Sentence for Assault of Public Safety, Emergency Medical or Public Transit Personnel. This bill would establish a two year mandatory minimum penalty for assaulting a correction officer or employee.

There has been a recent rash of assaults on correction officers. Some of these assaults have been of an exceedingly serious nature. We believe that this bill will serve as a meaningful deterrent to inmates who contemplate assaulting an officer.

We have seen situations where inmates have received minimal punishment for an assault of a correction employee. The recent legislative task force on correction staff safety drew attention to this problem. Consequently, some progress is being made in prosecuting such assaults. Yet, it is the belief of our members that this new law is necessary. It sends a clear, impossible to miss, message to inmates – “You will serve an additional two years in prison if you attack a correction officer or employee.”

According to the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, corrections front line staff is about 20 percent short of what it should be. Our members lack an up to date radio system to keep them safe in several facilities. Connecticut used to have two nationally recognized programs that cut down on assaults on staff. They have been seriously weakened. (One program restricted gang members to the Garner correction facility. The other moved chronically disruptive inmates to the Northern correctional facility.) Passing this bill gives the state a tool to bring down the number of assaults. It will cut down on workers' compensation costs and trauma to staff.

We urge you to vote for this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.